Little People, Big Love

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The light above me filtered softly through tall grass stalks, settling on the rough brown dirt. I moved carefully through the yard, my senses on alert for any sign of movement. I knew my target was nearby; I'd seen it from atop the gnarled roots of the oak tree. It had scuttled into the grass, and I was attempting to track it down- I needed to kill it to finish my new set of weapons.

The slender stem of a dandelion towered over me as I passed under its jagged leaves. There was a sound off to my right, and I froze in the weed's shadow, my blood freezing.

Something **big** was coming.

I was still deciding whether to bolt, hide, or prepare for a fight when relief washed over me. A ladybug trundled by, burbling to herself as she meandered through the grass. I slowly exhaled, letting my shoulders drop.

Ladybug from Grounded | Image: Obsidian Entertainment

“You okay there, Cami?” Nick’s voice crackled through my headset.

“Yeah, yeah. Just a ladybug,” I responded. “Still no sign of the wolf spider.”

“We can find it later. Besides, you shouldn’t be out so far on your own. It’ll be dark soon,” my boyfriend, Jeremy, chimed in.

“Yeah, you’re right.” I slipped out from under the dandelion and started the 300-centimeter trek back to base. As I approached a looming juice box, it struck.

I had barely enough time to sprint under the juice box, barely out of the wolf spider’s reach.

“Found it!” I shouted, knowing that Nick and Jeremy were too far away to get to me before the massive spider did.

I gripped my sprig how and nocked a thistle needle fletched with red mite fuzz. I drew and fired, the arrow lodging itself in one of eight red eyes. Enraged, the spider roared and scrabbled more desperately. I was too slow to escape its furious lunge; grazed by one of the fangs I needed, the spider’s venom began to hurt — badly.

I booked it, praying I'd have enough stamina to outrun the thing. It lurched after me, legs three times my height carrying it effortlessly over the uneven terrain.

"Guys, I'm not going to make it back."

"No luck this time, huh?" Nick chuckled, dismissing the terror in my voice (despite the fact that spotting this very same spider earlier had made him squeal).

"It's your fault for wandering off, silly," said Jeremy. "You're like a curious toddler!"

"Ha, ha, very funny. I'm going to try to kill it."

I turned my focus back to the spider, loosing several more arrows. Most of them missed, and I was running low. I swapped to my spear, made of tiny rock fragments, and decided to stand my ground. I wasn't going to make it to the boys anyway, and another spider-related death wasn't a big deal, even if it was mine.

Spider from Grounded | Image: Obsidian Entertainment

I resigned myself to the inevitable and readied my weapon. The wolf spider snarled and attacked, but a few well-timed blocks held it at bay for a moment. I managed to lodge the point between its enormous fangs, but the beast didn't slow down.

It reared over me, and I closed my eyes, ready to die…

But the final blow didn’t land.

“**Get off my sister, stupid arachnid**!” shrieked my nearly-thirteen younger brother, Z. He had apparently come out of nowhere, and the spider was at least as surprised as me. Before it could even react, he unleashed a flurry of attacks on its soft abdomen, using a dagger made from the fangs of the spider’s fallen brethren.

With a final wheeze, the spider gave in. Z immediately stripped its corpse for crafting parts and waited for me to catch my breath.

“Thanks for the rescue, buddy,” I gasped.

“Yeah, whatever. I gotchu,” he huffed, trying to sound indifferent. I knew better: Z was *immensely* proud of himself.

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Since the dawn of time, little brothers have wanted to tag along with older siblings. I’m sure little sisters do it, too, but I can’t speak for them- I don’t have any.

Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons | Image: Starbreeze Studios

As someone with three younger brothers, I have to admit that their incessant need to participate in whatever I’m doing can be irritating at times.

As an adult, however, I have come to realize that their need for inclusion comes from their desire to be with us, experience what we experience, and to be able to talk to us. Ultimately, it comes from their love and admiration for us.

In an ever-changing world, I find it increasingly difficult to connect with my younger brothers. When we were little, it felt easy and natural, but now that my older brother A and I have mostly left the nest, finding common ground with the little guys is much harder.

Enter the *Xbox*.

My little brothers love Xbox. Our first Xbox was a hand-me-down 360, and I have many fond memories of blitzing through the *Halo 3* and *Castle Crashers* campaigns, building majestic (in our opinion) *Minecraft* palaces, and wiping out bots, zombies, or each other on *Black Ops II.* Of course, our older brother always won, but that didn't stop me and the three younger ones from trying.

I didn't get an *Xbox One* until 2017, and it was highly coveted by all four brothers. They would beg to play it, with or without me, whenever they had the chance.

Flash forward three years. B is starting his freshman year of college, and K is absorbed in football and high school popularity. Z is not welcome in either of those worlds.

But, with the purchase of his very own Xbox and Game Pass Ultimate for his birthday, he's suddenly able to tag along again- and reconnect with his two oldest siblings.

With the A out of state for work and me in another city pursuing higher education, Xbox has been Z's way to spend time with us, wherever we are.

Even when he's not playing Xbox, he will frequently call me purely because he wants to share something exciting that happened in Rare's *Sea of Thieves* or tell me about a new friend he made online. And, whenever I'm home visiting, he talks non-stop about his new passion.

Sea of Thieves | Image: Rare

I’ve also found him to be more eager to hang out offline, shedding his reclusive nature. He’s started talking to me about school, friendships, the girls he likes, and how he’s feeling. Sometimes, he’ll even go out of his way to watch a movie he thinks I’ll like together or beg me to go play in the local pool. All of this is new.

As far as games go, *Grounded* was the big one.

After the early access launch of Obsidian’s casual survival game, I roped Z into playing it with me and a few others, including my boyfriend and some fellow Xbox Ambassadors. Nick, aka Nikorasu63, was one of those Ambassadors.

My little brother showed Jeremy, Nick, and me that it takes a team to wipe out spiders the size of trucks. It was him that drove us to build a beautiful, defensible base. He was the one who encouraged us to hunt spiders instead of running in fear all the time. And it was him who really made the game fun to play.

The enlarged backyard of Grounded and Z’s youthful excitement created the perfect environment for the rekindling of my own childlike sense of wonder, as well as reminding me what I really love about gaming.

It’s easy to resent younger gamers, be it for their squeaky little voices, over-the-top excitement, or general obnoxiousness. It’s easy to want to yell at my

little brother when he asks me to play Grounded every twelve minutes or talks for a solid hour about his most recent pirate adventure.

But we, as gamers, need to remember that we were once young and obnoxious. We wanted to be included, online and off, by older siblings, neighbors, and others around us.

> “We, as Xbox Ambassadors, are the big brothers and sisters of the community.”
> *GT Dex, 7-year Xbox Ambassador*

Xbox Ambassadors have a unique opportunity to be there for our fellow community members and support the next generation of gamers.

Find the “*little brothers*.” Find the kids who are new, the kids who *want* to tag along, the kids who *need* to be loved *and* included. Be *kind* to them, be *patient* with them, and maybe you’ll find they have something to teach you about yourself. One day, they’ll be the grown-ups, but for now, they need to be able to tag along.

And hey, who knows? They might save your tail in a game someday.

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And Z, when you’re old enough to be an Ambassador yourself, I’ll pull this post out of the archives so that you can know that I have always loved you, little buddy.